

Busy Time For Sculptor-Farmer White

By Karen Bartow

Richardson White is busy at this time of year. He's a farmer and he's got 25 acres of hay to cut at Holly Hill Farm on Jerusalem Rd. White is also a well known animal sculptor, a logger, sawmill operator, horseman, and designer and builder of farm machinery and equipment.

A vigorous man at 75, White offered some anecdotes and insights into his versatile life early one morning, while the dew dried off the hay. The studio where he has been creating sculptures for 45 years is adjacent to the stables, paddock, fields, and woodlands of the 200 acre farm.

A worn and comfortable place adorned with family pictures, clay and plaster working models of horses, sketches, tools, and equipment, it is topped by a leaky skylight. During the summer months White works mornings in his studio as the light is best then. Often he rides in the evening. He divides his time equally between farming and sculpting in the winter.

While he is the fifth generation of his family to live at Holly Hill Farm, he is the first to do so year-round and garner a living from the land, and the animals, for they are inextricably tied to his sculptures. He grew up with parents, grandparents, and stories of generations before, who shared his interest in farming and love of horses. Fox hunting, steeple chasing and flat racing were all part of his youthful past-times, as well as some interesting river and sea adventures. It still amuses him to recall the horse that was given to him and his sister. Since riding made her dizzy, he had

the horse to himself.

He attended Harvard University where he studied romance languages. Through a friendship with John Nichols Brown, he met Joseph Coletti, the late Boston sculptor with whom he started that career. Coletti was given his first commission by Brown at St. George's School in Rhode Island. White began studying and working with Coletti in 1927, "the very day I left Harvard," White adds. Their association lasted for several years, but White misses his Cohasset farm, so he returned there in 1934.

White always loved horses and wanted to raise and race them, but lacking the capital to do so, turned instead to sculpting them. The success that he has made of that undertaking reflects his indomitable spirit of ingenuity and inventiveness. The exquisite quality of his renderings attests his intimate knowledge of the animals, horses now.

He works first in clay. A plaster model is made from that and refined further. The final form is cast in bronze and a patina (application of chemicals to bronze to change color), and then wax are applied.

Although White detects minor flaws in his sculptures through impeccably critical eyes, they are measured by artists, sculptor, critics, and laymen as masterpieces. His ability to capture the energy, power, and grace of the horse in motion is unparalleled by any other American sculptor.

His pieces have included commissioned and Holly Hill Farm draft horses, thoroughbreds, Morgans, clydesdales, Arabians, and standard breds, as well as bulls.



Richardson White

(Gail Wills Photo)

Mr. Dinikian of The Arvest Gallery in Boston, where White's sculptures have been on permanent display since 1973, says, "Mr. White's knowledge of horse anatomy is optimum. His work is very classical, unique. There is no one else like him." Dinikian explains that White's bronzes are expensive (\$1,000 to \$8,000) for two very good reasons: "They are so good and he works only in additions of 10." This means that the maximum number of castings that will be made for each piece is 10, and only one is made at a time.

Clair Stein, Director of the National Sculpture Society of New York, hates to use the cliché, but admits, "He is a sculptor's sculptor. One of the best." White became a member of this oldest and largest association of sculptors in 1972 and has received their Bronze Medal in 1973 for his Bull, and the Hexter Award in 1976 for A Rearing Horse. Membership acceptance demands a thorough selection process, and the annual juried shows, in which prizes are awarded, further narrows down the field of the best. Stein feels White's success is due to his ability "to achieve a balance between absolute realism and abstracting the general planes of the animal — a difficult and rare accomplishment."

White says, rather modestly, "I am a machinist. I like to make things." He has applied his inventiveness and ingenuity to numerous mechanical projects on his Farm, and some ideas were well ahead of their time. If a new vehicle or machine was needed, he simply made one, using scrap parts, and his own lathe and forge. He had a great interest in hydraulics, and making utility tractors from Army surplus parts, adapted the concept in winches and lifters for the heavy chores of farm-

ing and logging. He experimented with four-wheel drive and invented a hydraulic wood-splitter. Front and back winches were installed on his vehicles, and he was called upon numerous times to help haul heavy equipment out of the mud. Although he tried, he wasn't successful in obtaining patents for some of these modernistic devices, but he operated his Farm efficiently with them, and in ways that were way ahead of their time.

John Dean, who worked with White on his Farm for three summers, remembers that "he would sit for hours and hours working over one particular detail until he got it right." Whether White was working on a piece of sculpture, or fitting a recycled steering wheel to a tractor, he has the ability to sort through the problem and find the right solution. Dean worked with White in the mechanical end

of farming, where they pooled his engineering background and White's mechanical and inventive prowess. Like most people who know White, Dean has great respect for his abilities and goodness and observes that "he is a fundamentalist who believes in the cycle of nature, of which he is very much a part."

Much admired in his hometown, Richardson White might smile to learn how pleased his friends and neighbors are to have the opportunity to look at some of his fine sculpture, currently on display at the David Sharpe Gallery, 3 South Main St. One friend remarked when leaving the gallery, "His sculpture is good, just like the man."

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